

Press Releases - Minister dumps recycling - 05/11/00

Issued 5.45pm 05/11/00

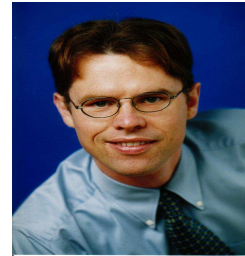
Minister for the Environment dumps recycling

See also [No recycling in Dun Laoghaire?](#)

See also [Letter to Minister](#)

See also [Letter to Irish Times Who Pays for Recycling](#)

Councillor Eoin Costello is calling on the Minister for the Environment to show vision and leadership on the issue of dealing with what the Minister has described as the impending waste management crises. With landfill sites rapidly filling up, many parts of Ireland will soon have no way of dealing with their waste. The only remaining landfill site in our county at Ballyogan is rapidly nearing the end of its life. According to the Environmental Protection Agency, Ireland's rubbish mountain increased by 37% between 1995 and 1998. Over 90% of this is going into landfill.



The European Community has started legal action against Ireland for its failure to implement the 1993 EU directive on waste management. The move leaves the state liable to penalties, which could run into millions of pounds. According to Councillor Eoin Costello, Minister Dempsey has left it late in the day to start taking the urgent action necessary to avoid EU fines being imposed. The Minister is looking for someone else to blame and has stated he will seek to pass on these fines to local authorities.

The minister has had a number of years in which to alert local authorities to the urgency of achieving the EU targets for waste reduction. Instead of championing a visionary approach to the problem the Minister has waited until it is too late for a recycling strategy to help be the major part of the solution and he is now threatening fines if waste reduction targets are not reached. These targets can now only be achieved if incineration forms part of the strategy.

The Environmental Protection Agency is particularly concerned at the continuing poor performance on the recovery of household waste and our continual reliance on landfill. In the Irish Times, October 23rd the Minister stated while recycling and composting are like mother and apple pie in terms of correctness they are unlikely to be successful on their own. Councillor Costello feels that the Minister has shown little serious interest in recycling initiatives from the start and is more interested in incineration than recycling.

Councillor Costello feels that recycling must form a major part of a national waste management strategy but to do this recycling needs more help from the Minister. In Austria over 40% of the country's waste is dealt with through recycling. In Germany 94% of the population recycle.

According to Councillor Costello the Minister prefers the hugely expensive incineration approach, which the campaigns of many communities have clearly illustrated, is not wanted. The government is pushing incineration because it's ideal for the private sector. However a report from the US Environmental Protection Agency earlier this year found that the cancer risk from dioxins created by incineration plants in some circumstances might be 1 in 100, 10 times higher than previous estimates. Also if all the planned incinerators are to be kept busy enough to justify their building and maintenance costs they will have to process such large quantities of waste that little will be left for recycling!

In the past recycling initiatives have been doomed to failure as they have been introduced in a piecemeal way and local authorities have been forced to subsidise them. Recycling needs to be a national initiative to achieve the economies of scale necessary to make it profitable.

The mistake that officials have made in Ireland is to leave recycling initiatives to private industry. Since the price at which recycled materials can sell on the open market fluctuates considerable one year it is worth a private company's time to collect papers and plastic bottles for recycling. However next year the cycle can have turned, as it has recently, and it uneconomic for these companies to bother collecting these materials (in Dun Laoghaire we saw our recycling initiative, Kerbside, go bankrupt last year). Rather than launch awareness programmes on recycling and the like the Minister would be better served to give subsidies to local authorities or private companies who are prepared to collect and process recyclable materials.

Last week the government in the UK showed great vision in establishing a £100 million fund last week to fund green projects promoting recycling, offshore windfarms and low carbon technology.

Councillor Costello argues that if the political will was there it is clear that change is possible. For example in Germany just 12% of packaging was recycled in 1992 but this rose to 86% by 1997. New recycling plants mean that more than 90% of German rubbish is now recycled. In stark contrast less than 8% of household and commercial waste is recycled in Ireland. The Minister must accept that his department has a major role in establishing a national recycling strategy and it is not good enough to keep passing the buck to individual local authorities in the absence of a national strategy.